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FIRST HERO OF THE CIVIL WAR

BY
CHARLES A. INGRAHAM

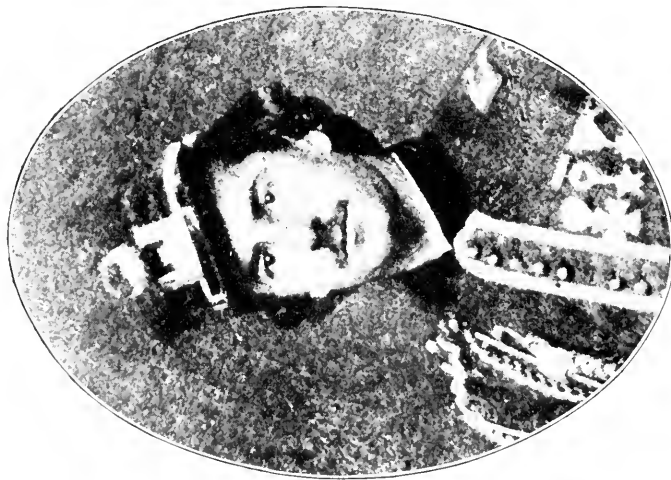


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COLONEL ELLSWORTH AND MISS CARRIE SPAFFORD

The picture of Colonel Ellsworth is reproduced from an original photograph in the Wisconsin Historical Library; that of Miss Spafford from a photograph supplied by Mrs. Charles H. Godfrey, Rockford, Illinois

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COLONEL ELMER E. ELLSWORTH: FIRST HERO OF THE CIVIL WAR¹

CHARLES A. INGRAHAM

On Monday, the twenty-ninth of April, 1861, fourteen days after President Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops, a regiment composed of 1,100 men, uniformed and equipped, marched the streets of New York en route to the national capital. Riding at the head of the column was the Colonel, a young man of twenty-four, small of stature, with flashing dark eyes and with a look of authority and power upon his handsome features. The crowds along the line of march cheered enthusiastically as the regiment passed—a magnificent body of men who at his call had rushed in the space of four days to the colors. It was Ellsworth's regiment of Zouaves, recruited from the firemen of New York City, and afterwards mustered into the service as the Eleventh New York Volunteer Infantry.

But whence came this wonderful youth who, as if by magic, had called into being this stalwart array—bold and fearless men, resenting restraint, but submitting cheerfully now to his iron discipline? Not many years before, he had been but an obscure country boy of northern New York, remote from the places of advancement and culture, a son of worthy parents, unable, however, to contribute of their limited means to the furtherance of the ambitious desires of

¹This article, which is intended to serve as an introduction to a biography of Colonel Ellsworth which I hope to bring out, comprises but a fraction of the data bearing upon his life and times which I have in my possession. To those who have afforded me assistance in the collection of this material I am deeply grateful; in particular I desire to express my indebtedness to the following persons: Milo M. Quaife, superintendent, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Caroline M. McIlvaine, librarian, Chicago Historical Society; Eugenia S. Godfrey, Rockford, Illinois; Mrs. Jessie Palmer Weber, librarian, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield; Isabella K. Rhodes, acting reference librarian, New York State Library, Albany; Jessie F. Wheeler, Reference Department, Troy Public Library; William A. Saxton, chief, Bureau of War Records, Albany, New York.

their offspring. In the brief space of a year he had achieved national prominence; having had up to the summer of 1860 but a local reputation, confined to Chicago and its vicinity, he became the popular idol of the entire northern country. At the head of his United States Zouave Cadets he had toured the leading eastern cities and won distinction for the extraordinary perfection of drill exhibited by his command. Shining through all this historic expedition appears preëminent the attractive personality of the young captain—knightly, magnetic, winning, lofty of character, able to control every one of his cadets under the imperious rule of his native authority and undeviating rectitude.

On the morning of the twenty-fourth of May, less than a month from the departure of the Fire Zouaves from New York, Ellsworth was killed at Alexandria. Not in vain was his fall, for it caused the hesitating northern people to reach firmly at last for the rifle. "Ellsworth's Avengers," the Forty-fourth New York Volunteer Infantry, recruited from every county of the Empire State, with unusual physical requirements and moral standards, marched from their encampment at Albany for the front on October 21, 1861. Well did they fulfill the name they bore, for on many a battle field this somewhat Puritanical regiment, remarkable for the scholarship and worth of its rank and file, never forgot the assassination of Ellsworth as they carried their rent colors against the foe. Still another regiment of New York City firemen, the Second Fire Zouaves, or the Seventy-third New York Volunteer Infantry, was recruited under the inspiration of Ellsworth's name and was mustered into the service on July 10, 1861. Reënlisting in 1864, it had a continuous service to the close of the war and enjoys a magnificent history.

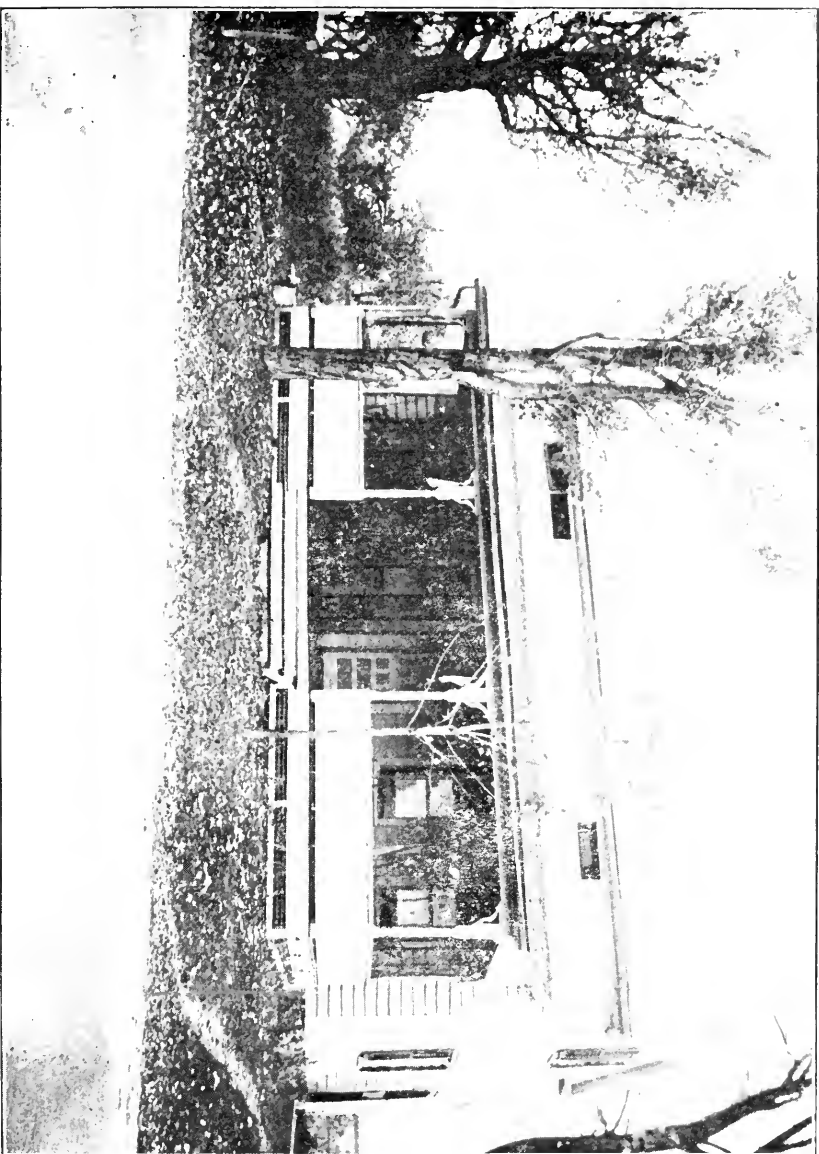
Thus Ellsworth had, to his immediate, demonstrable credit, the mustering in of three regiments, which constituted, however, but a small proportion of the multitude whose patriotic devotion was evoked by his death and who followed

the flag into the service. Yet many believe him to have been but a rash and adventurous person, vain and superficial. My study of his life, however, convinces me of the error of such opinion and that he was a young man of extraordinary gifts, prudent thought, gentle, loving instincts, and one who had been baptized with a fervent spirit of patriotism. Abraham Lincoln recognized his wonderful abilities and admirable traits of character and loved him for them, had his stricken, cold body brought to the White House, and wept over his remains as he would have grieved over those of his own son. And John Hay, in two notable magazine articles, one written soon after Ellsworth's fall, the other towards the close of Mr. Hay's career, has nothing but eulogy for the noble youth whom he had intimately known and loved as a brother. Surely, young Ellsworth had in him the elements of greatness! Schooled in poverty, disciplined by hardship and disappointment, his life is yet a shining path of pure living, high purpose, devoted patriotism, and worthy fame.

The motorist who seeks the birthplace of Ellsworth leaves the city of Troy, crosses to the west side of the Hudson at the northern limits of the town, and follows the macadam road along the river northward fourteen miles to the city of Mechanicsville. Here he will leave the river and proceeding in a northwesterly direction over a fine state road will reach at a distance of nine miles the little village of Malta, Saratoga County, seven miles this side of the city of Saratoga Springs. At Malta, Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth was born on April 11, 1837. The hamlet is much like thousands of others scattered over our eastern states; it claims its four corners, church, schoolhouse, and general store, but, with its spacious square, shade trees, and pleasant dwellings, it is more attractive than the average small village. The house in which Ellsworth first saw the light is yet standing, a well preserved, small, story-and-a-half structure, looking cheerfully out on the great road where thousands pass, ignorant of the honor which

it possesses. It has been called "the low-browed cottage," a characterization which is appropriate, for two small, oblong windows are suggestive of eyes peering out from under the eaves. Ephraim D. Ellsworth, Elmer's father, a worthy citizen and a tailor by trade, in 1836 married Phoebe Denton who resided here, and employed himself at this place in the business of his calling. He was of English extraction, born in the town of Halfmoon, Saratoga County, New York, and a man of bright intellect. His grandfather, George Ellsworth, as a boy of fifteen joined the American army operating against Burgoyne, fought in the battle of Saratoga, and was present at the subsequent surrender of the British army. George Ellsworth was thus a yet-living influence to develop the patriotic and martial spirit of his great-grandson, and, added to the special interest he took in the exciting story of the boy-soldier's adventures, was the realizing assistance afforded by the proximity of the battle field, nine miles away. Phoebe Denton could no more trace a distinguished ancestry than could her husband, and all that is available concerning her is that on her father's side she had an English lineage, and on her mother's, a "Scotch Presbyterian."

The boyhood life of Elmer in Malta was isolated enough but was relieved somewhat by the nearness of Saratoga Springs, which in those times was a leading watering-place of the country, where the wealth and fashion of the land disported itself. Many costly equipages every season would pass through the village, bound to and from Saratoga, not a few of them belonging to the southern aristocracy and having ebony coachmen on the box. Only two miles east is the beautiful Saratoga Lake, with the charms of which he was familiar. He was a good student in the district school, but not at all precocious or remarkable as a scholar. He was cheerful, fond of and a leader in all games and sports, but his greatest enjoyment was in reading; he would become lost for hours



BIRTHPLACE OF ELMER E. ELSTWORTH, MALTA, NEW YORK

in a book, heedless of the lapse of time. His mother was a pious woman and from her and the services of the Presbyterian church he derived deep religious convictions which he maintained throughout his life. He became, also, at an early age, a pronounced temperance disciple and, having heard a lecturer say that the devil dwelt in a cider barrel, wanted to take a "gun and cussion cap" and shoot him. His mother has left on record many interesting instances of his philosophical character and original sayings, but there is not room here to give them place. I may, however, be permitted to mention his purchase of his brother Charlie, the one other child in the family. Charlie was three years younger than Elmer, and the older brother conceiving a great fondness for him while he was yet a babe, and desiring him for his own, bought him of his parents for six shillings. From that time forward Elmer assumed a sort of guardianship over him and maintained that sense of obligation up to the day of Charlie's death. At an early age he began to evidence a proclivity for military studies and employments by exhibiting a preference for books dealing with war and battles; when but nine years of age he drew with wagon-paints on one side of a window shade a picture of General Washington and staff, and on the reverse side one of General Jackson and staff. A natural aptitude for sketching was further developed as he grew older and was of practical help to him in his military occupations. Many of his sketches are still preserved and cherished. After he had spent a year as a clerk in the employ of a Mr. DeGroff, who kept a general store at Malta, the family moved to Mechanicsville.

The ambition which Elmer had cherished of entering West Point Military Academy might have been realized had there been at Mechanicsville educational advantages whereby he could have gained the proper preparation, but the village, then a place of about 800 inhabitants, had nothing higher than district schools, and his father had not the means to send

him to an academy. He attended the school located on North Main Street, a brick building still standing and converted into an attractive residence. Mr. Ellsworth's trade seems not to have afforded him a sufficient income, for he adopted various makeshifts in order to provide for his family, such as peddling oysters, netting pigeons, and other like employments. Elmer was sometimes sneered at by his companions on account of his father's poverty and one day he whipped a boy soundly who had called him, "oyster-keg."

All this made a deep wound in the proud and sensitive heart of the boy, and throughout his career, in his letters and diary, may still be read the ever-recurring refrain of his desire to remove his parents from lives of grinding toil and carking care. This absorbing thought had been observed by President Lincoln and was mentioned in his letter to Colonel Ellsworth's bereaved parents as "conclusive of his good heart." But Elmer had the great privilege while living in Mechanicsville of organizing and having under him a military company: the Black Plumed Riflemen, of Stillwater, an historic village three miles above Mechanicsville. At this time, although but fifteen, short and slight of build, he would go through the manual of arms with the heavy muskets of those days with wonderful ease and rapidity. Throughout his life he was ever of a strong, virile constitution; quick, active, alert, he became in after years an accurate shot and a fine swordsman. Illustrative of his strength and agility and as exhibiting his qualification to lead others in performing startling feats, it is still told in Mechanicsville that one day a clerk in Hatfield's store (now the Mead Building) having heard a commotion in the second story, upon investigation, found that Ellsworth and the Black Plumed Riflemen had ascended there on a "human ladder"; the last ones were pulled up through the doorway from the sidewalk. Though Mechanicsville has grown to be a place of more than 8,000 population, the older parts of the town remain very much as when Ellsworth paraded the streets

with his riflemen. The old home, a pleasant dwelling on Ellsworth Street in the southern part of the place, still stands amid surroundings practically unchanged. The premises front on the embankment of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad; in the rear flows the now abandoned section of the Champlain Canal. Just south of the home and on the rise of ground is the residence of Robert Sears, deceased, who was an intimate friend of the family and who accompanied the stricken parents to New York to meet the remains of their son. Elmer was a welcome visitor here, where he and his companion, Charles Sears, had many a happy romp in the fields about the homestead. It is needless to say that the remembrance of Colonel Ellsworth is still a sacred one in the Sears family and that his memorials are cherished in the white mansion on the hill where he was gladly entertained and duly appreciated; for even at this early age it was evident that he was a lad of superior parts. Certain of the citizens have suggested changing the name of the place to "Ellsworth" and erecting a fitting monument in the midst of the city, a commendable proposal, though there are already nine villages named Ellsworth in as many states of the country, and notwithstanding that a noble granite memorial to his memory, unveiled with elaborate and impressive ceremonies on May 27, 1874, stands in the Mechanicsville cemetery.

Elmer's stay in Mechanicsville did not embrace above a year or more, and after having had considerable success in selling papers on the railway trains, he secured the consent of his father to leave home and try to make his own way in the world. He, therefore, in 1852, secured employment as a clerk in the store of Corliss & House, Troy, dealers in linen goods, where he remained about a year. The career of Ellsworth from now on to 1858 is difficult to follow in detail on account of the as yet scarcity of data from which to construct a satisfactory narrative. It is known, however, that from the time he left Mechanicsville to the hour of his death,

his life, though in its last two years astonishingly prominent and in point of honorable fame highly successful, was throughout an experience of almost unrelenting hardship and poverty; a beating about from one employment to another; a weary history of uncongenial labor and foiled ambition. It is probable that he was, to use his own words, endeavoring to "make a bold push for fortune," that he might quickly relieve his parents of that toil and privation, the remembrance of which seems to have burned into his soul to remain smarting there through the long years. Perhaps it would be charity to allow the mantle of forgetfulness to remain upon this period of unrequited effort, though from the glimpses we have in it of Ellsworth he is smiling and cheerful through it all, ever maintaining the most scrupulous honor and unblemished character. But the American people will desire the uncovering of every detail of the life of this remarkable young genius and martyr, whose very gifts of mind and heart, like those of many another, made him the prey of fortune.

On August 2, 1917, there appeared in the *Telegraph-Courier* of Kenosha, Wisconsin, a letter from Charles H. Goffe, a former resident of the city, and among his reminiscences of Kenosha is the following concerning Ellsworth in the summer of 1853, Elmer being then sixteen years old. I have nothing with which to corroborate Mr. Goffe's statement, but as it has the impress of truth and corresponds, though in an exaggerated manner, with what I have learned of Ellsworth's traits of character, I am disposed to give it acceptance. It is my opinion that, having saved a sum of money from his salary as a clerk in Troy, he resolved to "plod along" no further but to "make a bold push for fortune" in the West, and endeavor to find by prospecting a more promising field. Mr. Goffe writes:

"There was also boarding at Mrs. Bell's at this time, a young man of handsome features and fastidious ways, accentuated by a repelling hauteur and exclusiveness, so often

found peculiar to genius. His associates were few and his disposition was not calculated to make intimates of those he came in contact with. No one seemed able to penetrate the mystery of his personality and yet there was something about the youth which arrested the attention of all. But he was obsessed with a penchant or habit born perhaps of idle vanity of writing (or scribbling) his name in a bold, flowing, and not ungraceful hand, upon every scrap of paper, on the weather-boards of the house, and on gate and fence posts, a name which a few years later was on every tongue, flashed in the headlines of the daily press, and stamped in deathless lines upon the history of his country—the name of Elmer E. Ellsworth. . . . In the fall of 1853, when the Kenosha High School opened for the winter term under Professor DeWolff, Mr. Ellsworth attended for a while, but was not satisfied with school life, and suddenly dropped out of view and was for a time forgotten.”

Mr. Goffe says that when, two years later, he went to Muskegon, across the lake in Michigan, he learned that Ellsworth had associated with and been adopted by the Ottawa Indians who dwelt in those parts. After describing how he had been created a chief among them, made the recipient of high honors, and adorned with unique and gaudy apparel, Mr. Goffe continues:

“But, alas, when the novelty of barbaric glory and display had become stale, and the craving for other conquests and other scenes, and perhaps dreams of awaiting glories had disturbed his vision, this eccentric child of genius suddenly disappeared from his tribe and had gone no one could tell where. His people waited long, but he returned no more, and the red-skinned maidens of the tamarack swamps waited and sighed in vain for the handsome young chief on whom they had doted, and for whom they had hoped and dreamed. And the seasons came and passed, and the moons had filled

their horns many times only to wane and the white chief came no more."

As stated before, it is probable that Ellsworth visited Kenosha and it is likely, too, that on his way home he stopped at Muskegon and was with the Indians for a brief period, but that he remained there a year or more, as Mr. Goffe was told, or that he made any extended stay among the Redskins is highly improbable, though I realize that in expressing this opinion I am throwing ashes on what purports to be a romantic episode.

Returning to Mechanicsville and casting about for employment, Ellsworth recalled that in one of his trips between Troy and his home he had met on the train a gentleman from New York who, evidently attracted by his intelligent and prepossessing appearance, drew him into conversation and impressed himself favorably on the youth's mind and memory. Thinking that this transient friend might help him, he inserted a "personal" in the New York *Herald* which in due time brought a letter from the gentleman, who proved to be a drygoods merchant, and after a preparatory correspondence Ellsworth was made a clerk in his store. This was in 1853, the year of his visit to the West and Kenosha.

Concerning the two years that he spent in New York I have been able to secure but fragmentary and disconnected data. He remained but half of this period in the employ of the merchant referred to and when, in 1855, he went to Chicago, he did so in company with a party of engineers by whom he had been employed in improving the channel at Hellgate, not far from New York. This work was carried on by the aid of divers who deposited the explosive on the surface of the rock and this being fired by electricity and confined somewhat by the weight of water effected considerable execution. Just what part Ellsworth played in this work or how long he was engaged in it is not known. While in New York he was afforded an opportunity of



DRAWING MADE BY COLONEL ELLSWORTH
Reproduced from the original in the Wisconsin Historical Library

acquiring a better knowledge of military tactics through the drills of the Seventh Regiment, which he attended on every available occasion.

He was eighteen years of age when, with his brother, he went to Chicago, hoping to make better progress in providing means for the ease, security, and happiness of their parents. For, while yet a little boy in Malta, having been pained by the cruel words of a companion who had sneeringly remarked that his mother wore "patched shoes," he had told her that he would some day earn a lot of money so that she would be a lady as well as the best and "ride in a carriage." This ambition for his mother, that she might "ride in a carriage," was referred to hopefully in a letter dated Madison, Wisconsin, November 15, 1858. Though his brother, after remaining but a brief season in Chicago, seems to have given up the battle and returned home, Elmer held on and through the most discouraging experiences persevered and at last achieved a success which repaid him for all his suffering and humiliation.

Not long after his arrival in Chicago he engaged himself as a clerk to Arthur F. Devereux, of Salem, Massachusetts, who was in the patent soliciting business and who later became an officer in the Eighth Massachusetts Regiment. Ellsworth after a time became a partner with Mr. Devereux and the firm enjoyed prosperity when, through the defalcation of one whom they trusted, everything was lost and Elmer found himself without a dollar struggling again for the bare necessities of life. Three years had been passed in this business, as appears from Ellsworth's own words. He writes: "In an evil hour I placed confidence in an infernal scoundrel, was robbed of everything in a moment, saw the reward of three years' toil fade from my eyes when about to grasp it."

The occurrence of this catastrophe brings Ellsworth's career down to 1858, he then being of the age of twenty-one. Connected with the business of a patent solicitor are certain

legal aspects that require attention, and having in this way in a manner been introduced to the law, he determined to prepare himself for the full practice of that profession. He therefore entered the law office of Mr. J. E. Cone as a student. The remuneration he received for copying legal papers was wholly inadequate; for a time he slept on the floor of the office, and suffered, not infrequently, the pangs of hunger. During these months of hard study, drudgery of copying, and abject poverty, he retained his interest in military affairs, though he had no active part in them for the reason that he could not afford the expense of belonging to a company. However, he joined a gymnasium and made the acquaintance of Dr. Charles A. DeVilliers, who was an instructor in fencing, evidently in that institution. Dr. DeVilliers was destined to play an important part in the military education and career of Ellsworth, for he revived in him his ardent martial spirit and encouraged him in his desire to acquire an intimate knowledge of the French Zouave system of tactics and uniform with a view to introducing them into this country. DeVilliers was competent for this purpose, having served with a French Zouave regiment in the Crimean War and was familiar with all the details of their drill and equipment. The name and system were derived by the French in 1830 from the members of a mountain tribe of Algeria, (Arab., *Zwawá*) who, arrayed in oriental costume, wide trousers, fez, and loose jacket, were in their rapidity of movement and ferocity of courage famed as fighters. Ellsworth, of a romantic nature and a lover of the novel and dramatic, was attracted by this now famous and spectacular system, and sent to France for books fully explaining it and set himself to acquire the language that he might read them. In the meantime, with Scott's and Hardee's books of tactics open before him, he perfected himself in the manual of arms, not hesitating to introduce improvements of his own where they seemed desirable, his endeavor being to bring ease, grace, and celerity into

every movement. Under DeVillier's instruction he became the best fencer in Chicago, while his "lightning drill" attracted attention as he exhibited it in the gymnasium.

His reputation having reached as far as Rockford, Illinois, he was engaged in the summer of 1858 to drill the Rockford City Grays, a company that had been organized two years earlier. The corps made good progress and in September went into camp on the fairgrounds, remaining four days, during which time military companies from Elgin, Freeport, and Chicago visited the encampment. During his stay at Rockford Ellsworth made the acquaintance of Miss Carrie Spafford, to whom he became engaged, and for whom to the day of his death he cherished the highest regard and the deepest affection. Her father, Mr. Charles H. Spafford, was one of the pioneers and a leading citizen of the place and with his family was attached to Ellsworth and befriended him more, perhaps, than any others outside of his immediate relatives. In his last letter to Miss Spafford he refers to her parents as "father and mother." Mrs. Charles H. Godfrey, a sister of Miss Spafford, still resides at Rockford and occupies the dwelling where Colonel Ellsworth visited the family in 1858, and though she has no remembrance of him she cherishes the honor that her Christian name, Eugenia, was by him proposed for her to the family when he fondled her on his knee. Miss Carrie Spafford married Charles S. Brett, both of whom with their only son are deceased, Mrs. Brett having died in 1911 at the old home where the Colonel visited her. Not only did Ellsworth win the friendship and regard of the Spafford family, but his cordial manners and magnetic personality made him a marked individuality and a popular hero throughout the town.

In the following month of October Ellsworth went to Madison, Wisconsin, and was employed there in drilling the Governor's Guard, a military company organized in February of that year and made up of the leading young

men of the place. It is on record that on October 15, 1858, he was elected commandant of the Guard and began drilling the company, which at the beginning numbered twenty-five men, three evenings in each week. There is nothing to indicate how long he remained at Madison, though a letter to his mother, already referred to, bears date, "Capitol House, Madison, Wis., Nov. 15th, 1858," and it is probable that he was with the Governor's Guard in its parade of December 26 following, concerning which a Madison newspaper says, "They appear much improved in a military point." The State Historical Society of Wisconsin has in its archives several interesting memorials of Ellsworth's sojourn in Madison. There is some evidence that he drilled a company in Springfield, Illinois, at about this period, but the statements are so indefinite and inconclusive that I have refrained from giving them as facts. In a study of this kind it is necessary carefully to compare, weigh, and sift all the materials of information.

A definite landmark in the life of Ellsworth is his diary, commenced on his twenty-second birthday, April 11, 1859, and continued for a brief period.² This was in the spring following his agreeable and successful military employment at Rockford and Madison, but from which he seems to have derived no considerable emolument, for the entries in his diary relate experiences of his struggle with poverty. Concerning the purpose of the journal, he says: "I do this because it seems pleasant to be able to look back upon our past lives and note the gradual change in our sentiments and views of life; and because my life has been and bids fair to be such

² Ellsworth's diary has disappeared from view and there is a report which bears considerable evidence of being accurate that it was destroyed in later years by Ellsworth's parents. However this may be, it was given, upon his death, to Corporal Brownell, who had killed Jackson, his assassin. John Hay seems to have had access to it at one time, for in an article by him in *McClure's Magazine*, VI, 354, many citations from the diary are given. Prior to this, an unidentified writer in the *Chicago Times* of October 28, 1883, and in the *National Tribune* of October 15, 1885 cites so extensively from Ellsworth's diary as to render it probable that he had possession of it either at that or at some prior time.

a jumble of strange incidents that, should I become anybody or anything, this will be useful as a means of showing how much suffering and temptation a man may undergo and still keep clear of despair and vice." These pages afford an intimate view of his character and one which can be obtained from no other source; for they are even more personal and confidential than his letters to the members of his own family. They tell in easy, fluent style of his poverty, temptations, dawning success, meditations, and laborious study of the law in the office of Mr. Cone, to which he had returned after his engagement had expired in Madison.

Among the earlier entries in the diary is the account of his election on April 29, 1859, as commandant of the United States Zouave Cadets, of Chicago, a company superseding the National Guard Cadets, instituted three years previous, which company had become practically defunct. On abandoning the old name and armory the Zouaves made their quarters in the Garrett Block on ground now occupied by Central Music Hall. The drill and discipline of the corps grew to be more exacting and severe probably, than that to which any military company was ever subjected, for Ellsworth's aim was to improve the men "morally as well as physically" and "to place the company in a position second to none in the United States." The rules adopted and rigidly enforced proscribed drinking or even entering, without a valid excuse, a barroom, forbade visiting houses of vulgar resort, and gambling rooms, and prohibited the playing of billiards in public places. Ellsworth, himself, all his life was very abstemious; in a letter to his brother in 1858, he writes: "I don't use tobacco in any shape whatever; I drink neither tea or coffee." Running all through his career is the unmistakable evidence, especially visible in his private papers, that he was above all a moral champion: that his ethical principles overshadowed and governed his military ambitions. The proficiency of a cadet was no recommendation to his leniency:

if he transgressed the rules, he must go: twelve of his best drilled men were expelled at one time for drinking; but such was his influence over his command that as they dwindled away there was never a stampede, even under the laborious drills and the prohibitory discipline.

On the Fourth of July Ellsworth, having had the cadets in training but little more than two months, gave a public drill in front of the Tremont House and at once won the admiration of hostile critics, who pronounced the exhibition unrivaled outside West Point. This success was all the more remarkable when it is considered that Ellsworth had acquired his military knowledge entirely from self-instruction, never having been a member of a company when he began the occupation of drillmaster. Moreover, he was still very poor, subsisting part of the time on nothing better than crackers; but he could write proudly in his diary on the night of the Fourth: "Victory, and thank God!"

At Chicago on September 15 of the same year, at the seventh annual fair of the National Agricultural Society, Ellsworth with his Zouaves won a stand of colors valued at \$500, which had been offered as a prize in a competitive drill. Owing to the fact that only one other company drilled for the award, though the contest had been open to any militia company in the country, great dissatisfaction prevailed throughout the East and South that the Zouaves should under the circumstances be accorded such a distinction. The old military companies of the eastern cities scorned the pretensions of the "prairie boys," and ridiculed the idea of their being able to compete successfully with themselves. For Ellsworth had added fuel to the fire by challenging any company in the United States or Canada to drill for the champion colors, offering to pay their expenses to and from Chicago and stating that, starting on the following twentieth of June, the Zouaves would visit the leading cities of the



COLONEL ELLSWORTH AND FRANCIS E. BROWNELL.

(IN LOWER RIGHT-HAND CORNER)

From original photographs in the collection of Frederick H. Meserve, New York

country for the purpose of meeting those companies which had not found it convenient to come to Chicago.

The discipline and drill, beginning early in February, became more exacting than ever, as it was felt by the company that in order to retain the colors the orders of the commandant must be scrupulously observed. Ellsworth told them that "everything except business and the company must be sacrificed" and that till the date set for the departure, drills must be held every evening, except Sunday, from seven to eleven o'clock. Associated with the drill, which was practiced with knapsacks weighing twenty-three pounds, were strenuous athletic exercises, while through the month of June the men slept on the floor of the armory wrapped in their blankets. The start was postponed from June 20 to July 2, owing to the death from smallpox of Ellsworth's brother, who was a member of the company. This bereavement was a hard stroke for the commandant, who was already burdened with the care and discipline of the company and anxiety for the results. It was estimated that five weeks would be consumed in the tour and that the expenditures would approximate \$7,000, but the funds were far from being raised when the day of departure arrived. Moreover, the company's goods and chattels were attached by certain ex-members who had loaned it money and who were now smarting from the effects of Ellsworth's severe discipline; but this difficulty was quickly relieved by the generosity of Chicago citizens.

The last reunion of Ellsworth's Chicago Zouaves was held at the Wellington Hotel, Chicago, in November, 1910, at which eight members were present; five absentees were known to be living at that time. I have recently corresponded with Mr. J. M. DeWitt of New York, who is actively engaged in practical affairs, with Mr. Frank E. Yates of Chicago, and, through his family, with Mr. J. A. Clybourn, of the same city, who is in very poor health. This band of men, sifted out by Ellsworth and tried by the fire of his rigorous

discipline and training, not only achieved the reputation of being perhaps the most perfectly drilled military company in history, but held important places in the army during the Civil War and multiplied the instructions and principles which they had derived from their commandant.

The Chicago Historical Society has in its Ellsworth collection a crayon sketch drawn by him and evidently designed to serve as copy for the printer in preparing memorials of the tour, to be presented to the members of the company. Upon it are inscribed in consecutive order the names of the cities visited and the military organizations by whom the Zouaves were escorted and entertained, though the dates do not appear in all cases. The itinerary follows:

Chicago, July 2, 1860; Adrian, Mich., July 3 and 4; Detroit, July 5; Cleveland, July 6 and 7; Niagara Falls, Sunday; Rochester, July —; Syracuse, July —; Utica, July —; Troy, July 12; Albany, July 13; New York, July 14. 15. 16, —, 18, 19, 20; Boston, July 21, 22, 23, 25; Charlestown, Mass., July 24; Salem, July —; West Point, July 26. 27; Philadelphia, July 28; Baltimore, Aug. —; Washington, D. C., Mount Vernon, Aug. —; Pittsburgh, Aug. —; Cincinnati, Aug. —; St. Louis, Aug. —; Springfield, Aug. —; Chicago, Aug. 15.

The Zouaves were accompanied throughout their tour by a band of eighteen pieces, the Light Guard Band of Chicago; but though the company went forth with fine melody and unique and brilliant uniforms, they were hardy soldiers with bronzed faces and wiry, agile frames, who lived abstemiously and slept each night on the floor of their quarters. Temptations to indulge in wines and liquors were before them daily, but they resolutely turned away to take up the arduous work of their program. They were very young and somewhat undersized; by no means a stalwart array, as might be expected; but the wonderful precision, celerity, and grace of their drill and evolutions astonished and thrilled every town

they visited, and the accounts of their marvelous proficiency, telegraphed ahead, aroused widespread curiosity and brought great crowds to observe them wherever they went. Though the tour was made for the purpose of inviting competition, not a company ventured to face them, all cheerfully according them the palm of superiority.

The period in which the tour was made could not have been more opportune; a critical presidential election was on, with Abraham Lincoln heading the Republican party which stood for the nonextension of slavery, and with the avowed rife in the South that, should he be elected, war would ensue. Thus, the people were disposed to look with interest and enthusiasm upon military demonstrations. Ellsworth's experience was not, however, entirely without anxiety, owing to the lack of funds, which, until New York City was reached, was a source of worry; but at this point and in Boston large amounts were derived from exhibition drills given before immense audiences, and henceforward no difficulty was experienced on this score. The company reached Chicago on Tuesday, August 15, was accorded an ovation irrespective of party affiliations, and escorted to the accompaniment of pyrotechnics and a torch-light procession, to the "Wigwam" where Lincoln had been nominated, which was filled with more than 10,000 people. Mayor Wentworth gave a congratulatory address which was briefly responded to by Captain Ellsworth, after which, it now being midnight, the company was banqueted at the Briggs House.

Not long after this triumphant return Ellsworth resigned his commission and the company disbanded. Its career having been brilliant, though brief, it was better, it seemed to him, that the organization should dissolve rather than deteriorate under less rigorous discipline. Ellsworth, without delay, seeming to realize that armed strife was at hand, organized a regiment of Zouaves in northern Illinois, officered it with men from his old company, and presented the force

to Governor Yates to direct as he might deem expedient. Having become acquainted with Mr. Lincoln, he now entered his law office, not so much to pursue his somewhat neglected law studies as to promote a scheme which he was evolving of reorganizing the militia of Illinois and eventually of the whole country: to unify and bring the entire system more completely under the control of a central authority. Here begins to be manifest a wide grasp and a broad vision for which Ellsworth has never been given credit. To enjoy a reputation as a successful drillmaster and to control efficiently a company of fifty men was but the rudiment of his ambition and capacity; his mind went out firmly and sanely to broad fields, and he impressed his ideas upon Mr. Lincoln, who sought to give him an opportunity at the national capital to work out and put in operation these desirable measures. A start was attempted in a bill dictated by Ellsworth and introduced in the Illinois legislature while he was in Springfield, but though it was successful in the House, it failed in the Senate through causes other than a lack of merit.

During the autumn, Ellsworth employed himself on the stump, speaking for the Republican candidates, and exhibited decided gifts as an orator; a fine voice and presence, abundant humor and fluent expression gained him a ready hearing. In the meantime he had resumed his legal studies and later, passing a satisfactory examination, was admitted to the bar a few weeks before Mr. Lincoln started on his journey to Washington. The president-elect had invited Ellsworth to accompany him on the trip in the capacity of an officer to safeguard him by superintending the disposition of the crowds that everywhere met him. Arriving at the capital he was incapacitated with the measles, but when, on his twenty-fourth birthday, April 11, 1861, Fort Sumter was summoned to surrender, he soon shook off the lethargy of his convalescence, resigned his lieutenant's commission, borrowed what money John Hay had at his disposal, and

started for New York, resolved to raise a regiment for the service. In this he was promptly successful among the firemen of the city and in a remarkably brief space, at the head of the Eleventh New York Volunteer Infantry, was on May 7 mustered into the service in front of the Capitol at Washington and in the presence of President Lincoln. For a few days the regiment was quartered in the Capitol building, but as the command was acquiring a tendency to disregard the proprieties of the service, Colonel Ellsworth secured for it a camp on the south side of the east branch of the Potomac, on the high ground in the vicinity of the Insane Asylum, believing that here he would have the men under better control. An interesting, and to the Fire Zouaves a complimentary, event occurred while the regiment was in Washington. Willard's Hotel having taken fire, Ellsworth and his men after vigorous efforts quenched the flames and saved the building, much to the gratification of Mr. Willard, who entertained them at breakfast and gave Colonel Ellsworth a purse of \$500 to employ for the benefit of the regiment. This money the Colonel turned over to the committee that organized and equipped the Fire Zouaves, and it was eventually divided equally and applied toward the erection of monuments for Ellsworth and his successor, Colonel Farnham, who died of wounds sustained at the first battle of Bull Run.

On the evening of Thursday, May 23, the regiment was ordered to be ready to move at a moment's notice, and at 2 o'clock A. M. of the twenty-fourth marched from its camp and boarded the steamers *James Guy* and *Mount Vernon*. In the bustle and stress incident to the departure, the busy Colonel found time to write two remarkable letters: one to his parents, the other to Miss Spafford, his fiancée. They breathe a presentiment of death and were found (at least the former, and I think the latter) upon his body. The letter addressed to Miss Spafford has not appeared before in print and has been read by but a limited number of persons. Colo-

nel Ellsworth's last act before leaving his tent was to look at her portrait and place it in his bosom.³

My dear Father and Mother: The Regiment is ordered to move across the river tonight. We have no means of knowing what reception we are to meet with. I am inclined to the opinion that our entrance to the City of Alexandria will be hotly contested, as I am just informed that a large force have arrived there today. Should this happen, my dear parents, it may be my lot to be injured in some manner. Whatever may happen, cherish the consolation that I was engaged in the performance of a sacred duty; and tonight, thinking over the probabilities of tomorrow, and the occurrences of the past, I am perfectly content to accept whatever my fortune may be, confident that He who noteth even the fall of a sparrow will have some purpose even in the fate of one like me.

My darling and ever-loved parents, good-bye. God bless, protect and care for you. ELMER.

My own darling Kitty. My Regiment is ordered to cross the river & move on Alexandria within six hours. We may meet with a warm reception & my darling among so many careless fellows one is somewhat likely to be hit.

If anything *should* happen—Darling just accept this assurance, the only thing I can leave you—The highest happiness I looked for on earth was a union with you—You have more than realised the hopes I formed regarding your advancement—And I believe I love you with all the ardor I am capable of—You know my darling any attempt of mine to convey an adequate expression of my feelings must be simply futile—God bless you, as you deserve and grant you a happy & usefull life & us a union hereafter. Truly your own, Elmer.

P. S.

Give my love to mother & father (such they truly were to me) and thank them again for all their kindness to me—I regret I can make no better return for it—Again Good bye. God bless you my own darling.

ELMER.

It was a beautiful moonlight night and the bayonets of the troops could be seen glittering as they crossed the Long and Georgetown bridges for the invasion of Virginia. The

³The letter to Miss Spafford is owned by her sister, Mrs. Charles H. Godfrey, of Rockford. The letter to Ellsworth's parents has been published in photographic reproduction in the *Photographic History of the Civil War*, edited by Francis T. Miller (New York, 1911, 10 vols.), I, 351.

My own darling Kelly.

My dearest is
ordered to visit the river &
me at Alexandria within
his term. He may meet
with a warm reception &
my darling among so many
careless persons will be one
what likely to be felt.

By everything I should
suppose standing just as yet
his absence, the only thing
I can fear you the high
of happiness of which you
enjoyed was a man with
you. You have now a man
within the hopes of forward
regarding your absence
-ment and of better of his

You will tell the order of
an expedition if this time
my darling may attend
if more he cannot be able
-quite superior of my feel-
ings must be muchly full-
led that you as your
dearer and grand you
a happy & joyful life & no
a chosen forego.

With your own.

My dear,
You may have to another &
father (and they truly were
to me) and thank them
again for all their
kindness to me & regret of
can make me follow
nature for it again good
by but that you may own
darling's love.

regiment arrived at Alexandria, seven miles below, at sunrise, disembarked unopposed, formed near the wharf, and Colonel Ellsworth with a squad of men from Company "A" started at "double quick" into the city, intending to seize the telegraph office and dispatches. Observing the Confederate flag flying from the roof of the Marshall House, he sent a sergeant with an order for Company "A" to come up at once. It was evidently his purpose to detail the company to remove the flag, for he then passed on; but, as if reconsidering, turned and entered the hotel. It should be stated here that the regiment had come to Alexandria under embarrassing circumstances; for not only had certain of the citizens expressed a desire that they should not be sent to the town, but General Mansfield, commanding at Washington, had threatened to muster them out of the service should they not conduct themselves in an orderly manner. This partially explains Colonel Ellsworth's desire to obtain the flag without delay, fearing that it might enrage the men and lead to acts of vandalism. On the other hand, it is affirmed that before he left New York with his regiment, he remarked that "he would bring to the city the first secession flag he might encounter," and that "he would not order any of his men to go where he would not go himself." Just what was in the young colonel's mind will never be known; probably a variety of motives impelled him to the act. He knew that the city of Washington would be looking for the lowering of the "bastard flag," which for days had been flaunted as an insult and challenge to the capital city. President Lincoln at that very moment might be looking anxiously from the windows of the White House for its disappearance!

The Marshall House is an old landmark of Alexandria, constructed of brick and three stories high; it was famous as having entertained Washington. The flag was flying from a staff about twenty-five feet in length, attached to the frame of a rear dormer window, and was reached by ascending to

the attic by a stairway which had a landing and turn at the middle. Colonel Ellsworth and his party, having left guards at proper intervals, secured the flag, and were coming down from the attic, when Corporal Francis E. Brownell, who was ahead, observed a man with a gun, who proved to be James W. Jackson, proprietor of the house, standing at the foot of the stairs. He immediately sprang below, and struck down the weapon but before he could prevent him Jackson raised his gun, a double-barrel shotgun, and fired at Colonel Ellsworth, who had come onto the middle landing and taken a step or two down, the charge entering his left breast. The Colonel cried "My God!" and plunged headlong to the floor below, uttering soon after but a low moan. He fell near the room that had been occupied by Washington, and the medal he wore, inscribed, "Non nobis, sed pro patria," was wet with his blood. Brownell with great coolness and rapidity of action took aim and firing struck Jackson in the middle of the face and as he reeled to fall plunged his sword bayonet through him, the assassin's second shot flying harmlessly over Brownell's head. A scene of confusion followed the double tragedy, heart-rending cries of agony, as Jackson's wife bewailed her loss, resounded through the hotel, while the Zouaves, fearing that they were trapped in a nest of secessionists, posted themselves so as to command the corridors and ordered all guests into their rooms on peril of being shot down. Company "A" soon arrived on the ground, however, and on a litter improvised out of muskets, the body of Ellsworth was borne to the river, placed on the *James Guy*, and conveyed immediately to Washington.

Among the many tributes that were published in honor of Ellsworth, none were comparable to the beautiful words sent by President Lincoln to his parents. He wrote:⁴

⁴This letter is in the collection of Judd Stewart. It was privately printed in facsimile, with appropriate editing by Frederick H. Meserve, by the Quill Club of New York in 1916.

"In the untimely loss of your noble son, our affliction here is scarcely less than your own. So much of promised usefulness to one's country, and of bright hopes for one's self and friends, have rarely been so suddenly darkened as in his fall. In size, in years, and in youthful appearance, a boy only, his power to command men, was surpassingly great. This power, combined with a fine intellect, and indomitable energy, and a taste altogether military, constituted in him, as seemed to me, the best natural talent, in that department, I ever knew. And yet he was singularly modest and deferential in social intercourse. My acquaintance with him began less than two years ago; yet through the latter half of the intervening period, it was as intimate as the disparity of our ages, and my engrossing engagements, would permit. To me, he appeared to have no indulgences or pastimes; and I never heard him utter a profane or an intemperate word. What was conclusive of his good heart, he never forgot his parents. The honors he labored for so laudably, and, in the sad end, so gallantly gave his life, he meant for them, no less than for himself.

"In the hope that it may be no intrusion upon the sacredness of your sorrow, I have ventured to address you this tribute to the memory of my young friend, and your brave and early fallen child.

"May God give you the consolation which is beyond all earthly power.

"Sincerely your friend in common affliction. A. LINCOLN."

Importunate words throng me for expression, but they cannot be accommodated further; the rage and grief of the Fire Zouaves and their hardly-prevented purpose of burning the city of Alexandria; the universal sorrow and demonstrations of grief all along the funeral route from Washington to Mechanicsville. I would like to tell of my acquaintance with and reminiscences of Ellsworth's parents, of how the government provided liberally for them, of how their son Elmer fulfilled in death the desire that he had been unable to accomplish in life: that his mother might "ride in a carriage."

The fame of Ellsworth is destined to live on and to increase, for he individualized those elements of character which are loved and admired by the race universally. There was a deep well of patriotism in his romantic, generous nature, informed and directed by a keen and comprehensive intellect.

Though his life is almost like a fairy tale, it is steadied and rationalized by deep thoughtfulness, filial affection, and unaffected piety. The far generations will linger reverently over that final word of love to his parents and will shed a tear as they read of his last look at the portrait of the bride of his heart and of his going out to die. Ellsworth will yet come to his own and be appreciated and valued and loved for what he was: one of the noblest, purest, and ablest patriots who ever died for his country.

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